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QUEER RADICALISM(S): Editorial #7

Radicalism is undergoing a crisis. Various modes of thinking and engagement traditionally defined as "radical" have been losing ground as the criteria of radicalism are increasingly becoming dubious and unstable. Doesn't capitalism (with its liberal underpinnings) tend to be more radical than its most radical critics at every step, constantly "escaping forward"? Doesn't claiming radicalism often serve as a pretext for an elitist sense of superiority and for amassing symbolic capital - a stance that simultaneously degrades and objectifies all those who cannot "keep up"? Who can (materially, symbolically, and even psychologically) afford to engage in subversion, transgression, and radical opposition as a long-term strategy in their everyday life and politics? Who, if anyone, can articulate their own "radical position"? In short: is speaking from "radical positions" still radical?

To address those and similar questions we put together an issue of *InterAlia* on various more or less queer variants and critiques of radicalism in today's world. Queer theory and activism have long presented themselves as avant-garde, trend-setting modes of confronting both the heteronormative mainstream society and assimilationist (or homonormative) practices within GLT(BI) movements. On the one hand, queer is increasingly being accused of "exhaustion" and/or covert collaboration with existing systems of domination under the cover of supposedly radical transgressions, parodies, and demands. On the other hand, many queer thinkers and activists see an urgent need for new forms of engagement that might create an alternative to what Immanuel Wallerstein terms the present "modern world-system," particularly given the ongoing consolidation of the neoliberal political and economic order, and the revival of (neo)conservative authoritarian systems which effectively use a populist rhetoric to mobilize social discontent.

According to the dominant liberal political discourse, following the collapse of the bipolar world order in 1989 and the announcement by Francis Fukuyama of the "end of history," radicalism - as an anti-systemic discourse and practice of reorganizing the modern world-system - lost its *raison d'etre* . The "laws" of "History" and "natural human" pursuit of freedom pointed to the liberal-democratic order as the one which offers individuals and societies the most favorable conditions for "proper" development. After the fall of authoritarian "communist" regimes that paid short shrift to humanism and human rights, and after the marginalization of other socialist traditions (such as the marginalization of anarchism by the Hobbesian bugaboo of "war of all against all" and

by the historical reality of nation-states), in the dominant discursive systemic configuration, radicalism - understood as series of counter- or alternative narratives of economic development and the social dynamic that contest the *status quo* - was relegated to a position somewhere between the idle and preposterous dream of those who haven't done their history homework and the dangerous political extreme with a terrorist bent.

Yet neoliberal exorcisms did not succeed in expelling the spirit of radicalism, which constantly "haunts" the "depoliticized" (postpolitical) order of (neo)liberal democracies. In a world determined by the hegemonic capitalocentric (neo)liberal-democratic narration in which - according to neo-Marxist, post-Marxist, postanarchist and alterglobalist theorists, among others - the future is a privatized space accessible to the privileged few, while the vast majority of people on earth are doomed to "nightmarish scenarios" and an apocalyptic end of nature as we know it, antisystemic radicalism returns not just under the guise of alterglobalist practices and theories but also in the form of fascisms or religious fundamentalisms. In the age of the liberal-democratic hegemony (to use Zizek's term), that which is radical faces opposition from two quarters: normative discourse, according to which radical views, ideas, and practices are manifestations of "youthful rebellion," "immaturity," and being "out of touch with reality," but also capitalocentric (compulsive) consumerism, the "fashion" for things radical, subversive, contesting the *status quo* , the joyful "radical" carnival that often serves as a libidinal and/or moral safety valve for the middle- or upper-class liberal subject. Yet can a critical mind allow itself not to think and act "radically" in times when throughout the world the social, cultural, and natural realms are succumbing to methodical neoliberalization and precarisation?

Can queer theory really rise to these challenges? Can a perspective grounded in the experiences of sexual minorities be a point of departure for critiques of the entire world-system? Can we be sure that expanding the critical perspective to include that which sexual minorities have in common with other minorities, and transforming this perspective into a comprehensive alterglobalist project which is a (radical) form of leftism or (post)anarchism, will not lead us to lose sight of differences related to, among others, geopolitical positioning, as well as differences specific to sexuality?

A simple case in point: over ten years ago in *The Trouble with Normal* Michael Warner thundered against gay marriages (or civil/registered partnerships) because they went against traditional (sic!) queer radicalism. However, unlike the openly gay Catholic conservative Andrew Sullivan, author of *Virtually Normal* , Warner

did not give serious consideration to the problem that heterosexual marriages are, nolens volens, a form of discrimination against homosexual people for whom this institution is inaccessible in many places, and against all those who are not married. The queer critique of marriages (or civil/registered partnerships) indicates that they constitute a form of discrimination, but on the level of political postulates queer is critical of sexual minorities' demands, thus defending the radicalism of the queer movement, without simultaneously calling for (or not calling very loud for) the abolition of heterosexual marriages and partnerships. The queer movement does so for obvious reasons: such postulates might be considered too radical. But, in that case, is the vocal opposition to homosexual marriages really radical? Is it not, in fact, homophobic? In many countries, same-sex civil partnerships and marriages already exist. Though, on the one hand, the critique of legalizing such unions remains justified and productive, on the other, it is worth taking a close look at the way these unions impact social relations.

As illustrated by the recent controversy over the so-called antisocial turn in queer theory, one type of queer radicalism has been caught in a trap between a strategy of withdrawal, which is a form of self-stigmatization, and a leftist romanticism that postulates the possibility of changing the world in some inexplicable way through rebellion. (Although this is undeniably an important and interesting debate, it is worth keeping in mind that it has been so well publicized chiefly due to the hegemonic position of American academia.) The antisocial turn is associated, first and foremost, with the radical dissensus from harnessing the present to any vision of the future, as expressed in *No Future* . Edelman asks queers to consciously take on the role of outcasts and embody the social death drive imposed on them by the society. This would mean a turn towards anti-relationality that would stand in clear opposition to such manifestations of the integration of homosexuals as same-sex couples raising children. The radicalism of Edelman's stance lies in the symbolic, and to some extent also practical, withdrawal from society. Such an "exit" is a form of internal emigration that rejects active political engagement in the name of manifesting lack of consent to the social contract in its present shape.

A recent critique of Edelman's negativity invoked utopia as a horizon of hopes that motivates queer activism (see Jose Esteban Munoz, *Crusing Utopia*). This utopia, however, cannot be expressed through positive content. It has been pared down to fragmentary insights into the potentially possible, thus passing into the sphere of the sublime. This is a romantic proposition whose sense requires taking as real the symbol of that which is yet to come. On the one hand, it postulates concrete interests and conflict-solving strategies; on the other, it denies them agency in the

name of that which is to come, but which remains unknown. This conception of utopia (called "disidentification" in an earlier book by Munoz), programmatically lacking a positive program, is a surprising mutation of Foucault's postulate that we should act without a program but always in opposition to power into the postulate that we should always act somehow, regardless of what power is up to. Those skeptical of the proposition see Munoz as an unacknowledged Hegelian who naively expects that by rejecting the thesis he will find the synthesis. Although, chronologically speaking, it was Munoz who responded to Edelman's book, in fact the negativity postulated by the latter was directed against the widespread leftist romanticism of which Munoz is a bard. Munoz is probably right on one point, though: the deliberate embodiment of negativity postulated by Edelman seems to come more easily to those whose material future is secure.

Yet the lack of a "positive" program, that is, a program that includes concrete strategies and actions, desired institutions, and a horizon towards with one might stride, may be seen as fully justified: at the present historical moment, to elaborate a program for a world-which-is-to-come and to pursue a concrete vision would be to succumb to the Enlightenment logic of historical stages; it would be tantamount to admitting that yes, the subject can enter from one (epistemological and ontological) order into another, rewriting itself; moreover, the protagonist of this narrative is the autonomous liberal subject that can skip unencumbered between orders and shape reality according to its own expectations and dreams, provided that it makes the effort. Also, for one theorist to instruct society as to what it should do and where it should be headed would be a return to the Leninist concept of vanguardism and a betrayal of the (clearly queer) vision of society as non-hierarchical and egalitarian. The practice of (queer) utopia, or, better still, of an alternative society, would then approximate the practice of community economy discussed by the feminist anthropogeographers J.K. Gibson-Graham: it would be a "fluid process of continual resignification, discarding any fantasy that there is a perfect community economy that lies outside of negotiation, struggle, uncertainty, ambivalence and disappointment, discarding the notion that there's a blueprint that tells us what to do and how to be 'communal.' Indeed, it is a recognition that there is no way not to be communal, not to be implicated with one another, that recalls us to the political task of 'building a community economy'" (Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* , 2006: xv). It would thus be a (queer) utopia, or rather an alternative society which is "an emptiness - and has to be, if the project of building is to be political, experimental, open, and democratic [because] any attempt to fix a fantasy of common being (sameness), to define [utopia], to specify what it

contains (and thus what it does not) closes off the space of decision and the opportunity to cultivate the ethical praxis . . . [T]he emptiness at the center of the [utopia, which is a space of decisions,] . . . constitutes [it more as] a negativity with potential to become, than a positivity with clear contents and outlines" (ibidem).

In addition to postulates of pure negativity and faith in the utopian potential whose realization must always be deferred, according to Edelman's logic, we have in Jasbir. K. Puar's interesting book *Terrorist Assemblages* the return of the Deleuzian concept of assemblage as a constant production of forms and meanings. Puar describes the current confusion of concepts referring to South Asian religion and ethnicity, which western public opinion tends to collapse and to easily reduce to the rhetoric of "war on terror," a fact that has devastating consequences for people of South Asian origin in the US. Observing how easy it is to manipulate identity categories, Puar draws on assemblage as a concept better suited to describing reality. But this concept is associated with the hypostasis of production as a potentially infinite process; consequently, the present described by Puar seems to give way to that which is always to come in the name of the further proliferation of material forms and meanings. Some argue that the Deleuzian proliferation is a reflection of the surplus produced incessantly by the economic and symbolic system; its promise, if it is not simply identical with the promise of capitalism, boils down to the ambition to overtake capitalism on the path of development which it has mapped out; in order to free oneself from the hegemony of the system one has to keep one step ahead of capitalism, in the avant-garde. Deleuze's position would thus differ from that represented by Munoz in the programmatic absence of romanticism, yet it is often invoked in a way that suggests an engaged reading motivated by the hope for a better tomorrow.

Characteristically, sexuality has come to play a minor role in these debates. It appears indirectly, for instance in Edelman's work under the guise of the symbolism of the Child as emblem of the future in relation towards which we have an obligation - one which Edelman would like to deny. Sexuality also appears in the context of intersectionality, that is, when it intersects with other minority experiences. (The intersectional perspective often goes hand in hand with the critique of essentialism, though it usually serves to name new types of identities, such as "African American lesbian woman.") Sometimes, however, sexuality disappears altogether. The political scientist Cathy J. Cohen recently proposed (in a lecture on "Race and Queer Theory in the Age of Obama", ICI Berlin, June 12, 2012) that we treat as a "queer subject" an African American youth whose sexuality remains unknown, who was murdered by other African Americans. In this case the logic of queerness

depends on the non-obvious relations of violence and victimization unassociated with sexuality. One might then wonder whether expanding the queer perspective, which has historically centered itself on gender and sexuality, into some other subject positionings (or collective subjects) in a way which makes queer similar to a kind of radical left, does not lead to the sexuality and gender issues' not being paid enough attention to. We might also ask to what extent the alliance between queer and radical leftist thought - which involves a universalizing of the queer approach, and which at least occasionally blurs issues directly related to sexuality which are fundamental for queer - is really a radical development of queer. Doesn't this approach actually lead to a contradiction of queer or a loss of its specific perspective and its cognitive potential?

There are, however, scholars who see in intersectionality and the opening up of queer studies to "collaboration" with various radical socialist political philosophies a radical development of queer, for sexuality is not produced in a vacuum; it emerges in society and culture; sexuality does not originate in middle-class (or to use a Marxist vocabulary - bourgeois and imperialist) theories through which "citizens" are endowed with a sexuality that is intelligible (to the western-centric mind). Specific forms of sexuality are historical constructs; sexuality is always enacted within a world-system configuration that happens to be dominant at a given historical period; (as postulated by scholars of intersectionality,) it is always articulated at an intersection, with and against other positionalities, such as gender, class, or ethnicity. No-one is pure sexuality; no-one has a monolithic identity based solely on one socio-cultural determinant. Therefore, to approach the problem from the opposite direction, can we really argue that intersectionality conceived in this way undermines queer's cognitive potential?

The ongoing debates in queer theory indicate that it is not entrenched in a few narrow axioms (though some examples of this problem could easily be found), and that it is capable of constantly asking new and important questions concerning the dynamically changing socio-political reality. It is also capable of questioning its own assumptions and orientations. Puar's reflection on the uses of queer for moulding societies and populaces into the forms of social class, race, ethnicity, nationhood, gender, and sexual orientation is a valuable contribution to these debates. By means of the notion of "homonationalism" Puar and others critique, among others, the practice of inscribing particular conceptions of gender and sexuality in systems of biopolitical control and in various more or less veiled nationalist and neocolonial projects; an earlier critique of homonormativity as an element of the domination of neoliberalism was proposed by Lisa Duggan. Yet another kind of radicalism is represented by the editors of *Queering the Non-Human* , which

extends queer reflection beyond the "human" sphere or blurs the boundary between the human and non-human, under the rubric of "posthumanism" in contemporary critical theory. Regardless of whether we agree with them or not, the proposed perspectives, theories, and terms testify to the rapid expansion of queer theorists' field of interest and the vigilance with which they respond to the changing socio-political situation. What these perspectives and theories have in common seems to be the impulse to contest various aspects of liberalism as a foundation of the capitalist-neocolonial world order, on the one hand, and, on the other - where "liberal humanism" is concerned - as the foundation of a legal-social order based on certain definitions of "man" and his "rights."

Arguably, queer theory - like the idea of (left or, more broadly, socialist) radicalism - is in some sort of crisis (not to say an "identity crisis"). Perhaps those queer critics who write about the failure of the queer project, and who turn to more traditional identitarian and assimilationist positions, have a point. But as Judith Halberstam argues in *The Queer Art of Failure* , failure or defeat often turn out to be far more productive than heteronormative identitarian neoliberal "success." ("Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world", Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* , p.2) Queer's relative defeats are accompanied by (as a cause or effect or both) the hybridizing of queer theory, its promiscuous mixing with a large spectrum of political and social issues, theories, and activities. Some fear that queer will be absorbed by the radical left (whatever this term might mean in the so-called post-communist world) or by some other ideological-political formation, and will thus cease to exist as an autonomous theory; others expect that it will define itself anew in relation to that which might distinguish it, and which concerns non-normative sexualities, also at the intersection of other markers of difference: class, ethnicity, gender, as well as geopolitics and worldview. To defend a queer "essence" would clearly be a betrayal of one of the basic tenets of queer theory. It seems that instead queer should take up the challenge of hybridization, even if it means risking defeat or its own undoing, an eventuality referred to both by Edelman and Halberstam though in a different context.

If we wish to hold on to the traditional liberal political vocabulary in which the "rights" of specific "reified" subjects are a key concept, then we might ask whether "rights" - for instance LGBT rights - are always territorially limited and refer to specific subjects. If so, do they always exclude someone. Can we imagine a situation in which politics is not about the struggle for access to limited resources - one of the central neoliberal dogmas? Are queer coalitions - such as

those formed by some LGBTQ activists in the Middle East and elsewhere (mostly in the US) with the movement for Palestinian autonomy, or in Poland between the GLT(BIQ) movement and feminism - an expression of solidarity based on a shared political vision, the recognition of a common source of oppression, or political calculation to achieve concrete goals? What are those goals? What should they be? In whose name are they formulated? When queer abandons single-issue politics, that is, when it ceases to concentrate on gender and sexuality - without drawing on critical analyses of the modes and forms of producing gender and sexuality in the capitalist-neocolonial world - does it necessarily become a synonym for all mechanisms of oppression?

Yet while we Polish scholars critically examine in the academic setting what might come of combining queer with radical left movements, Polish queer practice (including that of the UFA Collective, Love Without Frontiers, or the Silesian Queer Collective) draws heavily on the tradition of feminist anarchism; it is anti-capitalist, pro-ecological, and tries to develop and sustain nonhierarchical human relations. This practice tends to assume that the philosophy most closely aligned (in the ethical sense) with queer thought is the anarchist strand of socialism: both say no to the legal and political dictate of the majority, to the state's fashioning of individuals into "citizens" reified, among others, in terms of gender and sexuality, and to the subordination of life to the dominant (non-egalitarian and non-liberationist) trends and philosophies.

We have written elsewhere that in Poland the feminist and the GLT(BIQ) movements often march together. Women's demonstrations (Manifas) include GLT(BIQ) postulates and emphasize the participation of lesbians; feminists, in turn, are present at GLT(BIQ) parades and marches. Up to a point, this phenomenon can be explained in terms of the overlap of these (relatively small) groups. An obvious reason for marching together is the recognition of a common source of gender and sexual oppression in the deeply entrenched patriarchal culture, one of whose features is homophobia. It seems, however, that a more concrete calculation underlies the coalition between Polish feminism and the GLT(BIQ) movement. The feminists' main postulate is the need to lift the ban on abortion (introduced in 1993 against public opinion and despite a constitutional petition for a referendum). Meanwhile, the main postulate of the Polish GLT(BI(Q?)) movement is the introduction of registered partnerships. The public understands the fact that advocates of these (ostensibly cultural) postulates support each other - both constitute an element of the liberalization of state policy which in fact sanctions the private sphere, evaluating it from a moral standpoint. It seems more likely that the second of these postulates might be

achieved: it is (unwillingly) brought up as a slogan in election campaigns, and recently the Polish parliament voted against a civil partnerships bill. This was also the fate of the recently introduced bill that would end the ban on abortion. The abortion ban is considered to be a stable element of the historical "compromise" reached by the state and the church post 1989. The feminist postulate has additionally been overshadowed by the more recent issue of in-vitro fertilization opposed by the Catholic church and by the newly-appointed justice minister. Under the circumstances, the mutual support of those who advocate legal changes pays off because it helps to publicize issues that public opinion is beginning to see as a logical chain of political demands, and if one of the changes is introduced, a breach will have been made in the defenses of the conservative camp, enabling further changes. The logic of this coalition seems transparent and rational in the sense that it may help both movements to achieve their goals.

Reaching those goals will mean the victory of identity politics, though its parameters differ depending on the local context. But won't this also be the defeat of queer politics? Writing these words we also consider the consequences of the laws which will refer to particular subjects whose identity will be reified in order that they might take advantage of the laws. According to the bills, registered partnerships would be available to both same-sex and heterosexual couples. We do not know whether refunds for in-vitro fertilization will be available only to heterosexual couples, or only to married couples, or couples in long-term relationships. (There is no way to predict when the abortion ban might be lifted and on what terms.) It is likely that these rights will also be limited in other ways, depending on the status of people residing on Polish territory. Such are the practical and foreseeable issues connected with concrete legal changes. But should they mark the horizon of queer? Would it not be a drastic narrowing of the horizon of that which is possible in queer thinking and political action?

One question we should ask of queer radicalism concerns the possibility of a politics that is not directed solely at the introduction of laws associated with specific legally defined subjects. We might ask the same question in the context of coalition building. Some radical queer splinter-groups in Poland and elsewhere postulate a much wider understanding of coalition based on a sometimes vague vision of doing politics also at the national level (and probably also at the international level, since states exist within an international system). For instance, could the postulate that gays and lesbians should have the right to enter into civil partnerships be replaced by the above-mentioned postulate of abolishing the institution of all civil partnerships, or of getting the state to recognize all forms of partnerships (such as a partnership composed of multiple

partners)? How might changes in economic relations or in the global, geopolitical balance of power which left-wing, altergrobalist, (post)anarchist and some queer movements are working towards impact the forms of gender and sexuality produced in the social field? Or perhaps this question looks to far forward, obscuring real projects that might be implemented "here and now"?

As for the content of the Queer Radicalism(s) issue: Halina Gąsiorowska studies (post)anarchists' attitudes towards marriage, and asks whether the radical edge of resistance towards marriage has not grown more blunt in recent years due to cultural change in the Polish society. Anna Zawadzka argues for the need to reassess radical slogans (in this case - the postulate of non-hierarchical relations within informal feminist and queer groups) in light of the everyday functioning of such groups, as sometimes lofty slogans tend to obscure the actual reproduction of inequalities within these groups. Rohit Dasgupta's article, in turn, illustrates the cultural relativity and problematic nature of "queer radicalism" as a category: though, on the one hand, Bollywood cinema acknowledges the existence of homosexuality (a fact that in the Indian social context may be seen as a radical intervention in the cultural sphere), on the other hand it neutralizes the potential radicalism of filmic representations, postulating the inevitability of heterosexuality. Few ideas are as radical as the notion of the end of the world. What kind of radical charge is packed into the apocalyptic prophesies of the end of the world and (paradoxically) the affirmation of negativity? According to Volker Woltersdorff, the consequences of such millenarianism are not necessarily radical. Instead of negating the future he proposes that we focus on the notion of the "end of the future," which produces the need for the "work of mourning," the only queer mode of recovering the future.

The three final texts constitute a subsection titled "(De)constructing sexuality - theoretical and research perspectives" guest edited by Ewelina Ciaputa, Justyna Struzik, and Katarzyna Zielińska, and preceded by a separate introduction. The key assumptions of these texts were presented during the 2nd Academic Feminist Congress in Cracow, which took place on September 26-28, 2011. Agnieszka Kościańska's article discusses a radical intervention into the conservative cultural space of the debate on masturbation in the early 1990s. According to Kościańska, this debate contributed to the redefinition of the notion of cultural citizenship in Poland. Monika Rogowska-Stangret presents the main ideas of the philosophy of Elizabeth Grosz who postulates the rootedness of emancipatory anti-identitarian politics in the materiality of bodies. Finally, analyzing several nineteenth-century French novels, Przemysław Szczur argues for the subversive potential of novelistic attempts to theorize

homosexuality, whose Bakhtinian dialogic offers an alternative to monologic scientific theories.

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The undersigned have a confession to make. Never before has the joint writing of an editorial been so strenuous and marked with significant, not to say radical, differences, as if proving the validity of the very questions we asked in our CFP last year. Sometimes the negotiations were relatively easy: a simple change of a linguistic form, say from "is" to "can be seen as," toned a particular idea down when other co-authors could not subscribe to it. Other questions were left open. All in all, the reader may still be able to discern certain rifts and ambiguities in the main body of this editorial. The questions that our "behind-the-scenes" discussions ultimately boiled down to were quite fundamental: What, if anything, can (still) count as "queer" (and where)? What, if anything, can count as "radical" (and where)? And, inevitably, Lenin's famous question: what then is to be done, here and now? In the name of what, with what political calculation in mind? While some co-authors favored queer's alliances with anti-capitalistic and anti-colonial movements, others feared such alliances would ultimately dissolve the uniqueness of a queer position in projects that are too large to maintain that uniqueness. On the other hand, the claims that queer's goals should be kept "realistic" and "practical" and thus the queer movement and theory should rather concentrate on such issues as same-sex partnerships or marriages were countered with the argument that such a stance collapses the queer "project" (if there ever was one) back to the good old identity-based LGBT politics. Indeed, the co-authors were unable to come to any common conclusions or visions of action.

Tomasz Basiuk, Tomasz Sikora, Rafał Majka